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SHALL CLERGYMEN BE POLITICIANS?

THE clergyman in politics is by no means a novel or modern figure. He has always been familiar in Rome; and in France, Germany, England, every country that has had a state church, he has often played a prominent part. But in our own country, where the church and the state are constitutionally separated, his position is necessarily somewhat different. His appearance is doubly significant. He represents theories and tendencies that, although familiar to us in history, are as yet foreign to us in experience. He has a prophetic importance. And therefore it may not be improper to endeavor to set forth briefly, in an abstract and impersonal way, some of the principles and truths that apply to him in this present age, and under this non-sectarian government.

In the first place, all clergymen are men,—except those few that are women, and they are hardly numerous enough to count. As men, they have the same duties, rights, and privileges as all other citizens. These may be briefly enumerated, with regard to political questions, under three heads. First, they have the right of free thought and free speech, sacred, inalienable, inestimable; second, they have the duties of obedience to law, loyalty to government, and the exercise of their active powers for the highest welfare of their country; third, they have the privilege (which is also a duty) of voting on all questions of public interest, in accordance with the dictates of their reason and conscience, with none to molest or make them afraid. Of these rights and obligations no professional restrictions can rob them; and the church that attempts to obstruct or hinder its ministers in their exercise has no farther claim upon the protection of a republican government.

In the second place, all clergymen are bound by the responsibilities of their office, and by the definite instructions of the

Bible, publicly to support and exalt "the powers that be," in the exercise of lawful authority. They must preach the Christian duties of obedience, order, and loyalty. They must pray with their congregations for the chief magistrate and all others that bear the staff of rule. They must endeavor to enforce, with the holy sanctions of religion, the precepts of that inspired law of life which commands men in the same sentence to "fear God" and "honor the king."

These are clear and positive principles. They can hardly be denied by any one who takes a candid view of the obligations of citizenship and has an intelligent faith in the doctrines of holy Scripture. If they were honestly followed and applied, they would make all the clergy faithful, earnest, and eminently useful citizens. I think they are sufficient, and at the same time I think they are exhaustive. They cover and sum up, within their sphere, the whole duty of the clergyman. Beyond this he has no business, no calling, no place. As a man, he may do what he pleases, within the limits of the law. But as a clergyman, an office-bearer and representative of a church, claiming, or at least exercising, an influence by virtue of his sacred profession, carrying with him the more or less venerable titles of Reverend and Doctor of Divinity,—as a member of a class that derives whatever power and authority it may have from its separation from the world and its peculiar connection with religion, he ought not to enter publicly and officially into party politics; he ought not to mingle in the active strife and petty conflict of an ordinary political campaign; he ought not to weaken the force of his loyalty to the general Government by violent advocacy of a particular party; he ought not to misuse the official authority that has been given to him by the church for a higher purpose, in attempting to control the decision of purely economic and personal questions upon which the church, as the Kingdom of Christ, has, and can have, no opinion. Remembering, then, that we do not now speak of the private action of individuals, nor of the conduct of those men (often of the largest talents and widest usefulness) that are virtually separated from the distinctive office of a clergyman (which is the oversight and instruction of the church), we may sum up what remains to be said under three points.

The clergyman in politics is superfluous. He has no special fitness or training for this sphere of activity. In fact, we may

question whether he is not actually unfitted for it. And certainly his frequent and absurd mistakes, when he attempts it, have often given occasion to the pious to mourn, to the ungodly to scoff, and to the politicians to swear. Why should the clergyman attempt to tell you how to vote? He is not a master of political economy. He has no angelic intuition in regard to questions of fact. The only ground on which he can assume a peculiar right to instruct or control any one in these matters is the theory that a spiritual father must also be a temporal director; and this is a theory against which, I think, the majority of the American people have an unconquerable prejudice.

The clergyman in politics is disloyal. The government under which he lives affords a generous and impartial protection to all forms of religious faith and worship; it does not discriminate between them. The official or judge who should be influenced in his decisions by denominational considerations, saving all his favor for the Protestants as against the Roman Catholics, or perverting justice to serve the Baptists rather than the Methodists, would be worthy of universal execration, and probably he would receive it. As men, of course, the officers of government may belong to any religious body they may prefer; but as officers they are bound to be impartial. The same principles apply to clergymen as officers of the church. Reciprocity is essential in toleration. A non-sectarian state implies a non-partisan church. If you destroy one you destroy the other. If you bind any particular church to the support of any political party, rather than to the larger loyalty that knows no parties, the result is inevitable, though it may be slow. You are binding that party to the support of that particular church; you are undermining the foundations of civil and religious liberty; you are unconsciously preparing the way for the worst kind of union between church and state, a union in which the word "church" shall be synonymous with a sect, and the word "state" synonymous with a section. If such a result should ever come to pass,—and it is not beyond the bounds of possibility,—it is morally certain that the favored church in a democracy will be that which can cast the largest vote. None of the younger denominations can possibly compete with it in a race of this kind. It would be a bitter but not an unjust humiliation, if the members of those distinctively Protestant communions which have always professed to cherish the principles of religious lib-

erty, equality, and toleration, grasping in an evil hour the sword of political interference, should in the end perish by that same sword. Let the clergyman that flings himself and his church into a strife manifestly partisan and secular, reflect whether he is not thereby weakening and impairing that sacred allegiance which he owes first of all to the country at large, and to the Government in its highest conception, not as an instrument of sectional triumph, but as an embodiment of that supreme power and authority which God has delegated to human rulers.

The clergyman in politics is injurious. When he lowers the pulpit to the level of the stump, when he turns the worship of God into what is virtually a political caucus, when he attempts to lead the church as a religious organization into the train of any candidate for office, he is doing a great and irreparable harm to the cause of religion. I endeavor to write guardedly; I would not accuse any man of consciously doing these things. But it cannot be denied that there are tendencies in this direction; and in time these tendencies, if not checked, will result in a more or less complete demoralization of the clergy and secularization of the church. That will be a fatal day. We shall then see ministers of the gospel indulging in the vituperation that a recent writer in this REVIEW has so sharply denounced as the most shameful feature of our modern politics. "Party discipline" will teach them to condone immoralities on their own side, and to repeat slanders against the other side. A lack of worldly experience, combined with a professional habit of rhetorical statement, will produce an *odium politicum*, compared with which the traditions of the extinct *odium theologicum* will seem like the stories of a Golden Age. We shall see the stewards of the bread of life waiting for the crumbs that fall from Cæsar's table, and hear the notes of the gospel trumpet blending with the blare of political brass bands. We shall have churches constructed on party lines, where none shall enter unless they vote the right ticket, where the acts of the candidates will be expounded more frequently than the Acts of the Apostles, where the great revivals will occur in every fourth year, and the most urgent question will always be (with an eye to the main chance), "What shall the harvest be?"

May that evil day be far distant! May an enlightened Christian sentiment, and that sense of reverence for the church

in the purity of her ideal life which still exists, not only among the clergy, but also (and perhaps even more generally) among the wise and thoughtful laity, protest against these tendencies, and call a halt upon every man who would take even a single step in this direction. The kingdom of Christ must not be brought down to the level of the kingdoms of this world. Its mighty influence must not be imperiled for the attainment of secular ends. Its purity must not be sullied, its divine independence must not be sacrificed, by political alliances. Within its walls there must be neither Republican nor Democrat, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free, but all must be one in Christ Jesus. And all its energies must be devoted to the great work of redeeming and purifying human lives. I believe that the interests of religion are supreme above all other interests. I care more for the honor and power of the holy church of Christ than for any other cause on earth. And I had rather see all political parties buried together in a common grave than suffer one blot to fall upon the purity of the church, or see her sway over the hearts of men impaired or weakened by a single degree. May my right hand forget her cunning and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth when I am drawn by allurements from without, or driven by dictation from within, to swerve by a hair's-breadth from the preaching of religion, or to range the royal, blood-stained banner of Christ among the flags and ensigns of a political procession.

HENRY J. VAN DYKE, JR.

THERE are two orders of Christian ministers — the hierarchical and the fraternal. The fraternal minister has influence simply by what he is in original endowment and by education. Like men in all other professions, his influence is the legitimate influence of his personal character and his professional skill. All this the hierarchical clergy have; but over and above all natural talent, they receive, by virtue of ordination, an authority directly from God, to announce truth, and to convey through ordinances certain invaluable graces and spiritual gifts that come to men only through such channels. Such divine special endowments lift them above their fellow-men. They constitute

a spiritual nobility. In all matters of religion they are to men as the voice of God.

Now, though it is quite possible to imagine that in common affairs, not within the sphere of revealed religion, they may have a place as citizens, and may take part and lot in the ordinary duties and privileges of citizens in a free country, yet it is difficult to prevent the imagination of men from conceiving that a priest is still a priest while acting as a citizen, and that he is unfair, in that he brings the authority of the religious sphere to bear upon politics and civil administration. And this impression is intensified from the fact that the church and the state in other lands have been, and still are, united. It has been a prudent practice in America that priests should not carry their priestly influence into politics. This has been the prevailing practice among Catholic priests and among Episcopal clergymen. Setting all these aside, and not entering into the question whether in our day and under our institutions the priest may not profitably strip himself of his priestly character, and like the unconsecrated citizen take a full share of political action, we wish to point out how utterly without any professional excuse are all Protestant clergymen who renounce the sacramental theory, and who regard themselves in no sense as a class set apart from common men, other than is the lawyer, the physician, the artist, the engineer, or the mechanic.

In theory, Protestant clergymen are moral teachers, whose influence depends upon their original endowment, their education, their moral influence, and their wisdom. They are simply men among men. They are above men by no ordination. They receive no prerogatives of God. Their whole force lies in the wisdom and goodness of their lives. It was Paul and Barnabas that cried out at Lystra, "We also are men, of like passions with you." It was Paul that declared of his moral power, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." While the clergyman is a consoler, a counselor, a nurse to the young, a guide to morality, he is, before all things, and professionally, a teacher, a moral teacher; and it is in this view that his rights and duties must be discussed.

There are several things that must be taken for granted in discussing the right and duty of the American clergyman to take part in politics. It is to be assumed that he has common sense; that each man is at liberty to determine the best method

of employing his influence, whether by private conversation, or by preaching from the pulpit, or by his pen, or by public speech from the platform. It is taken for granted that a clergyman knows enough to discriminate between the aims of political action and the mere instruments by which those aims are sought to be accomplished, and that he has the ordinary prudence that guides men in selection of time and place and other circumstance. With these preliminaries I would argue :

First. That all procedure which puts clergymen into a class and pretends to elevate them above their fellow-men, and by reason of their holy function frees them from contact with the ordinary duties of humanity, is most pernicious, both in its philosophy and its morality, and nowhere so emphatically as in America and under our Government. No man is to be known before the law, in our land, as a member of any class, and though in fact there are exceptions, they are wrong, and should be abrogated. The clergyman, in the eye of the law, is simply a citizen, as is the physician, the lawyer, the teacher, the engineer. Public convenience may demand that doctors and teachers should not be subject to military service; but it is not for any reason in them, but because their functions involve the safety of large portions of the community. The law wisely regards simple citizenship, and not the occupation of the citizen. Of all ungracious pleas for exemption, that is the most pernicious that pleads the sanctity of the clerical office, as if there was a holiness in it that relieved the clergyman from the common duties of citizenship.

Second. With all the more force will these views apply to the clergyman in a land where the body of citizens have laid upon them the solemn responsibility of determining the laws, of securing their execution, of electing the magistrates and executive officers, and of forming the whole policy of the state. No man has a right to be an exempt. No man has a right to put contempt upon the political duties of the citizen, least of all the clergyman! Certainly there are many disagreeable things demanded of a patriotic citizen. He must act upon an equality with his fellow-men, however plain or even low or vulgar they may be. Before the ballot-box, as before the altar, all men are equal—the drunkard and the temperate, the judge and the vagrant, the coarse and the refined, the educated and the ignorant. To separate one's self from one's fellows may be allowable in many social relations, in the sanctuary of home, and in

groups gathered by elective affinity. But all the more important is it that all those duties which bring men together in common duty, common citizenship, and common humanity, should be vigorously maintained. If by reason of superior endowments, advantages of wealth, attractions of refined leisure, or relish of literary or philosophical pursuits, men grow unwilling to mingle with their fellow-men or to take up political tasks and burdens, refusing to perform amply and continuously their political duties, they do in fact remit to the less fit, and to the positively unfit, the whole care of the state, its politics, magistracy, and morality. This is distributive treason. When this long procession of selfish men — the rich man, in his self-indulgence; the artist, in his daintiness; the scholar, in his literature; the fashionable and the indolent, in their glittering selfishness — are seen moving away from politics, it will only need a robed and recreant clergyman at their head to form a band of infamy, trampling under foot the very life of their country!

Third. Because he is by profession a moral teacher, the clergyman should be an example to his flock, of conscientious, patient duty performed, and from him they should receive both incitement and instruction. The man that preaches only an abstract gospel is but a pulpit cypher. It is the gospel applied that clergymen should preach. Christian ethics is the very soil out of which all graces of spirituality grow. Modern notions of the dignity of the pulpit have well-nigh disrobed the pulpit of its legitimate power. The man in the pulpit should be a man from among men, in full sympathy with his fellow-men, not ignorant of their trials and stumbling difficulties, and able to fortify men against the temptations peculiar to every walk of life. His parishioners are not in half so much danger of falling into false theology as into false weights and measures, into selfishness, animosities, revenges, and all forms of unjust conduct. There would have been fewer Christian men in the penitentiary to-day if the pulpit had succeeded in establishing in men's minds a clearer idea of what is safe and lawful in business. Less dogma, more morality! The world to come must be reached by a wise walking in the world that now is. In like manner a minister should instruct his people in political duty and in their political dangers. Two elements are needed to exalt politics from the low level at which it now exists: the influence of woman, and of a faithful pulpit. Such themes as these, at suitable times, should be discussed as belong-

ing to Christian ethics: 1. The meaning of citizenship, its responsibilities and duties. 2. The sin of bribery. What is bribery? and what are the kinds and shades of it? 3. The vote, its meaning and value. The purchase of votes, the throwing away of votes. 4. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego types of Christian men walking in the fierce fires of a political canvass. 5. Injustice and slander in politics, and all forms of revenge. 6. The distinctions between principles and policies in the state. 7. The sin of withdrawing from all participation in politics. 8. Clergymen are the guides of their people in the ethics of daily affairs. 9. Race question—the duty of superiors to inferiors. 10. The hindrance or the destruction of the weak by the strong is of the very essence of a malignant infidelity, a crucifying of the very heart of Jesus. If it be said that clergymen are ordinarily unfitted to discuss such themes, then, in our age and in our country, they are unfit to preach the gospel.

Fourth. It would be well for ministers of religion if they studied the life of Christ more and theology less. Jesus was no dainty teacher in professional robes. Born to poverty and labor, he never forsook his mates. He lived among them; he ate and drank with them; he preached to them of their special sins and special duties; he refused the dignity of rabbiship, and to the end was a man among men. He rebuked rulers; he exposed hypocrites and pretenders in high places; he meddled with the temple, the altar, the officers thereof; and in Galilee and in Judea, alike among peasants, fishermen, and scholars, he laid down the great ethical laws on which should be built a sound practical morality. Little like him will be his professed preachers that talk long and loud of philosophy and theology, but whisper softly in muffled pulpits of the duties of morality of every-day life, and think themselves holy in proportion as they neglect Christ's example of life and teaching. If ever there was a stern and practical moralist, it was John the Baptist. Christ's criticism of him is significant. What went ye out to see? a reed shaken in the wind, a pulpit marvel, a tremulous, an incessant quivering novelty? A man clothed in soft raiment? a robed, cushioned, fashion-loving priest, teaching the respectabilities of fashionable society? No, a prophet, a stern teacher of rigorous morality in all its phases and applications. Yea, more than a prophet, a man that loved righteousness and hated all shams and elegant dishonesties.

Fifth. The example of American clergymen in the Colonial days, through the Revolution, and afterward, until the mephitic gas of slavery had well-nigh suffocated the pulpit, is instructive. Ministers in New England were the counselors of the magistrates. They were expected to teach their people what were their political duties, as before them, in England, the Puritan clergy had aided in establishing civil liberty upon religious foundations. To-day the pulpit is regaining its old American tone. In single instances it may work harm; but no harm of injudicious men can be half so harmful as a pulpit without a message to common people about their daily duties, their common temptations, and above all, without a word of instruction to men as citizens fulfilling their sublime duties to the laws, to the magistracy, and to the policy of this great nation.

It is objected, that a practical union of church and state is likely to result from meddling ministers. No more than from meddling lawyers, meddling doctors, meddling school-masters. On the other hand, the very way to induce the evils feared is by erecting into a privileged class men who assume to be too holy to meddle with affairs that belong to common citizens.

It may be said, that the minister has an unfair advantage; that his audience cannot reply; that he can exert a partisan influence which will offend, divide, and break up a church. All this is quite true; but it could only happen to one without skill, prudence, or tact. It is an argument against the misperformance of duty, and not against the imperative duty. If a clergyman waits till sides are taken, till men's passions are aroused, and then assails or defends, he will show an utter want of common sense. He must instruct his people in the duty of citizens, as part of his yearly task; he must educate them to a conscience in all political action; he must exalt the duties of patriotism; must make distinction between good men and bad, long before hot and turbulent times arise. As a general thing, instruction from the pulpit upon political duty should not be given on the eve of an election. When the lines are drawn, and the air is lurid and torrid, the pulpit should be silent, and the clergyman should exert his influence through some other channel. In tranquil times, between great political campaigns, if ministers would give to their people such discussions as abound in Dr. Francis Lieber's text-books, there would be neither complaint nor disturbance.

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